

EXPERIMENTAL SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY IN JAPAN: STUDIES IN SOCIAL CONFORMITY

by Robert Frager¹

Research on Japanese conformity is not only of interest and value in its own right, it is also a representative issue that can tell us a great deal about Japanese experimental social psychology. Rather than give a superficial overview of all social psychology, I think it more profitable to discuss, in some detail, the topic of conformity as an example of the state of social psychology in Japan today.

Theory and research related to conformity in Japan have a further significance. Experimental research can yield new perspectives on old issues in Japanese area studies. Careful, quantitative laboratory studies of social behavior can be a valuable, even indispensable, adjunct to anthropological field studies and sociological survey research.

As Caudill has pointed out earlier in this volume, many statements about behavior in Japan are implicitly comparative. Scholars have often written that "The Japanese are very 'x'" (introverted, excitable, inscrutable, skillful, or whatever), or "In Japan there is a high rate of 'y'" (suicide, dissatisfaction, conformity, and so forth). In all such statements, the writer is implying a baseline. Otherwise the terms "very" and "high rate" are meaningless. Empirical research is badly needed because intuitive and implicit judgments are often unreliable.²

As an important issue in its own right, conformity merits greater attention than it has yet received in studies of culture and personality. Most research in culture and personality is still devoted to child rearing and early socialization. Thus conformity research, which tends to focus on adult social behavior, has been generally ignored in spite of virtually unanimous agreement among scholars on the need for more comparative research on adult behavior (viz. Inkeles and Levinson 1969).

Theory and Research in Cross-Cultural Psychology

Most cross-cultural research in psychology has suffered from overemphasis on atheoretical "fact" collecting. All too frequently, research in a foreign country takes the form of simple replication of an experiment or translation of personality and attitude scales. Cross-cultural research should

ideally proceed from a clear sense of problem, a prediction derived either from psychological theory or from observed cultural differences that have implications for psychology.

Duplication of an experiment has no special value simply because the duplication takes place in a foreign country. Why bother to do cross-cultural research unless there are reasons to expect that experimental results will be significantly different in a particular society? For example, one might want to replicate in Japan an American study of the effects of authoritarian and democratic leadership. White and Lippitt (1960) showed that American boys worked more happily and efficiently under democratic leadership, and they concluded that this type of leadership was generally more effective. However, it is possible that strongly democratic ideals and upbringing of the American children led to preference for the democratic group. Replication of this study in Japan, where hierarchical relations are more important, would test this possibility. On the other hand, replication of a study of abstract problem-solving in Japan is likely to be meaningless *unless* there is reason to assume that Japanese and American problem-solving processes are different.

When values or behaviors are strikingly different in two cultures, it may be useful to study the psychological antecedents and consequents. Unfortunately, very little work of this kind has been attempted in Japan. Most research in Japanese social psychology has utilized Western theoretical and methodological models; there has been little comparative study of uniquely Japanese behaviors or values. Doi's (1962) concept of *amae* is a good example. It would add a great deal more to our understanding of Japanese behavior if this behavior pattern were studied comparatively. We could, perhaps, define what specific factors lead to a choice of *amaeru* as a method of dealing with others, or investigate the effects of *amae* as compared with related behaviors preferred in other cultures.

Conformity in Japan

Theories and descriptions. Discussions of Japanese social behavior often stress the importance of social forces and the strength of pressures toward conformity. Virtually all discussions of Japanese society have stressed the importance of group membership. Benedict (1946) describes Japan as a "shame culture" in which behavior is determined by social standards rather than personal values. Hajime Nakamura (1964) has emphasized the importance of a "social nexus" underlying Japanese behavior. This is combined with traditional distaste for abstract, rational, and individualistic thinking. The result is conformity. In a study of Japanese values, Caudill and Scarr (1962) found a strong collectivity orientation in Japan as compared with the United States.

Kerlinger (1951) indicated that in group interaction in Japan, decisions

were not traditionally made through voting. A negative vote might seriously offend the proponents of an issue. Rather than abiding by the wish of the majority, complete unanimity was sought. Kerlinger points out that group process in Japan can be extraordinarily complex. There is strong reluctance to give individual opinions, a reflection of the deep-seated Japanese value that denigrates individualism as immature and selfish. Though the group leader does most of the proposal-making he cannot be too arbitrary. He must be a master of "anticipatory conformity," because if individual members disagree fundamentally with the group decisions, they are likely privately to disregard those decisions in spite of unanimous verbal acquiescence at the meeting.

The situation in modern Japan seems considerably more complex. This complexity might be attributed to postwar changes in Japanese society, or perhaps to greater sophistication among modern observers. Nakane (1967) has written that since democratic ideals have grown in popularity in modern Japan, strong antiauthority feelings have arisen. The traditional Japanese leader used to dominate the group members, whereas leaders in Western cultures generally have influence equal to that of their followers. In modern Japan, however, the members have come to dominate the leaders. If the leader is weak, it is considerably more difficult than otherwise to agree on a decision. If all members are equal, there is a tendency toward a breakdown in Japanese group cohesiveness, which is based on a network of hierarchical interpersonal relationships rather than the Western pattern of adherence to abstract rules and shared goals and ideals.

Vogel (1965) has shown how children are trained to be submissive, dependent on the family, and fearful of outsiders. This pattern continues in adults as a strong *batsu*, or clique, orientation. Loyalty is one of the strongest and most basic values in Japan, and there is never a fully legitimate basis for rejecting the group. Vogel supports Nakane's contention that the hierarchical structure is losing its strength. Modern Japanese tend to be controlled more by their peers than by their superiors.

DeVos (1960) has shown that it is incorrect to attribute all of Japanese motivation to shame. Guilt is also important, although the psychodynamics of Japanese guilt are quite different from those in Western culture. In Japan, guilt comes from violation of a moral system based on family duties and responsibilities. It derives primarily from the suffering and self-reproach exhibited by the Japanese mother when her child misbehaves. The Japanese child internalizes guilt and learns to judge himself and to evaluate his own behavior. However, the Japanese pattern is still socially oriented. Standards of behavior apply only to relevant social situations, unlike universalistic Western moral standards based on abstract principles and generalized ideology.

Japanese research on conformity. Early research on Japanese con-

formity consisted of uncritical replication of American studies, with no attention given to defects in the original experiments, unique issues in Japanese conformity, or even observed differences in American and Japanese data. These circumstances also applied in most of the early Japanese experimental social psychology.

Misumi and Haraoka (1960) replicated an American study by Bennett (1955) on attitude change in various social situations, such as group decision, group discussion, and lecture. Although their results were quite different from Bennett's, there was no attempt to investigate the reasons for these differences. For example, Bennett found that there was no significant difference between group discussion and lecture, but that a lecture followed by public agreement with the speaker caused greater attitude and behavior change than the lecture alone. In Japan, there was no significant difference between the two lecture situations, but there was greater attitude change in group discussion than in the lecture. These differences might be explained by theories of Japanese conformity—the latter by the importance of group membership, and the former by the Japanese distinction mentioned by Kerlinger between public compliance and private belief. The data require further explanation and investigation.

Tasaki (1961) based his experimental design and personality measures on American studies. Although he found relations between conformity and ten different personality traits, he does not discuss the adequacy of the American-oriented personality variable for Japanese subjects and, although the author does mention one or two related American studies, he does not give a single reference to Japanese research on conformity.

Kinoshita (1962, 1964) has also utilized American research designs to measure conformity, and her results are discussed solely in terms of related American research. She gives no analysis or explanation of differences or comparison with Japanese research. Of special interest is her finding that differences in group cohesiveness are not significantly more important in producing conformity than differences in the personal importance of the issues raised. Although her data are similar to American findings, they appear to be inconsistent with discussions of Japanese group orientation.

Research by Hiroshi Nakamura (1967, 1968) is more sophisticated in dealing with the description and analysis of special features of Japanese conformity. In one study, subjects are presented with the following situation: "You are a member of a six-man group. The other five members have met together for almost two hours to decide an important issue. You are the only one with a different opinion. Which of the following four alternatives would you choose? 1. Since the others are agreed, I will give up my opinion and go along with the group, 2. I will have to suppress my personal opinion and publicly agree with the group, 3. I understand the

others' position, but I will stick to my own opinion, and 4. Unanimity of opinion isn't good for the group; I will keep my opinion."

Nakamura used this model in several situations. Either the group is unanimous, or one person agrees with the subject; there is no chance for discussion with group members, or there are five minutes left for discussion. These variables seem much more relevant than those used by Kinoshita or Tasaki to the theoretical issues in Japanese conformity discussed earlier. Nakamura then attempted to relate his conformity measure to actual social behavior, personality and cognitive variables. By use of the semantic differential he has also investigated the psychological significance of various Japanese terms related to conformity, such as *dakyo*, *kyocho*, *docho*, and *ison* (Nakamura, 1968).

As Wagatsuma has pointed out earlier in this volume (see also Wagatsuma 1969), one of the great drawbacks in Japanese social psychology is the neglect of cultural differences. Japanese psychologists rarely consider the variable "Japan." Differences in Japanese and American data are rarely explained in terms of national character, values, or social structure, and are seldom pursued in subsequent studies.

With a few exceptions such as Nakamura, Japanese social psychologists have not constructed their own Japan-oriented experimental designs. This might be due to their desire to imitate the more sophisticated experimental social psychology of the United States; but Japanese psychologists interested in cross-cultural research are forced to adopt American designs for comparative purposes since they rarely have the opportunity to gather American data themselves. Comparative research would benefit tremendously if more Japanese psychologists did research in the United States. It would be refreshing and instructive to have studies of American social behavior designed by Japanese using Japan as an implicit baseline for comparison. Such research will not only tell us more about Japan, it is also likely to provide fresh approaches and ideas to "American" social psychology. Rosenthal's (1966) work on experimenter bias calls attention to dangers inherent in restricting experimenter sampling. The effects of limiting the theoretical approaches and empirical methodologies of the experimenters may have as great an effect on the results obtained as bias in subject sampling.

American studies of conformity. Most Japanese research has not reflected the growing theoretical sophistication of American conformity studies. In one of the original conformity experiments, Solomon Asch (1956) placed a single naive subject in a group of confederates who were instructed beforehand to give unanimous answers to some simple and obvious problems of perception. The group gave the wrong answer to half of the problems, thus confronting the subject with a conflict between his own private judgment and the opinions of the unanimous majority.

Later studies indicate that conformity is not a single or simple psychological process. Deutsch and Gerard (1955) studied two kinds of social influence operating in the Asch situation. Informational social influence occurs when the subject treats the group response as new information and comes to believe the group is right and his first judgment wrong. Normative social influence operates when the subject still believes in his original judgment, but chooses to give the majority answer anyhow so as not to appear different from the group.

Most researchers have assumed that independence is the only alternative to conformity. Hollander and Willis (1967) suggest instead that the opposite of conformity is anticonformity. Both are responses oriented to group norms rather than to private judgment. The conformist gives an answer that differs from his own opinion in order to be *similar* to the group. The anticonformist gives an incorrect answer in order to be *different* from the group. In a sense, the anticonformist is as dominated by the group as the conformist.

Independence falls on a different continuum. The alternative to independence is inconsistency.³ Independence occurs when an individual is consistent and logical in his judgment, so that his initial and subsequent judgments are unchanged. The other alternative is that private opinion changes from initial to subsequent judgments. There are many possible reasons for this, including uncertainty, insecurity, illogicality, and plain perverseness. In both cases, public response is consonant with private opinion. However, in the first case initial and subsequent opinions are the same; in the second case, they differ.⁴

Japanese anticonformity. Hollander and Willis' own research on conformity and nonconformity differs considerably from most conformity research. Rather than experiencing conflict between individual judgment and group response with respect to a simple problem of perception, the subject is given a highly ambiguous problem and told of the response of one other "subject" who is perceived as either highly accurate or highly inaccurate (Willis and Hollander 1964).

The only report of anticonformity in the Asch group pressure situation comes from my own Japanese research (Frager 1970).⁵ By anticonformity, I mean that even when the group of confederates gives the correct answer, the subject answers *incorrectly*. Forty-three of 128 subjects (over one-third) were anticonformists. This figure is truly astounding considering that anticonformity was never reported in hundreds of similar conformity studies done in America, Europe (Milgram 1961), Africa (Claeys 1967), and Asia (Whittaker and Meade 1967).

Why is anticonformity found only in Japan? Are there certain unique facets to Japanese personality or culture that cause anticonformity? My own research indicates that, in Japan, conformity is correlated with

traditionalism (Frager 1969, 1970), and anticonformity is related to rejection of modern culture (Frager 1970). Japanese values play an important role in conformity and nonconformity behavior.

One possible explanation for the phenomenon of anticonformity is that the Japanese subjects reject as illegitimate group pressure toward uniformity. In a comparative study of workers' attitudes in Japan and the United States, Whitehill and Takezawa (1968) found that, if authority is seen as illegitimate, Japanese tend to resist *more* than Americans. Japanese workers were more likely to resist if a superior ordered a change in working conditions that they thought unjustified. They were also more in favor of supporting management if the union declared a strike they considered unjustified. Whitehill and Takezawa have termed this sort of behavior "loyal insubordination." Japanese workers claim that it would be a betrayal of their company to obey a superior whose orders they consider likely to fail or prove detrimental to the firm.

In addition to anticonformity, there was also evidence of inconsistency. Some subjects occasionally disagreed with the correct majority response, but also agreed at times when the others were incorrect. Since they did not react consistently to the group, neither conformity nor anticonformity is appropriate. If these subjects were operating on the basis of logical, consistent, and independent judgment, they would not have made so many errors. It seems likely that lack of self-confidence plus conflict between private opinion and group response caused some subjects to become tense and confused. Lacking faith in their own judgment they become more apt to vacillate in their opinions and to respond inconsistently from trial to trial.

Lazarus and his associates (Lazarus et al 1966) discovered that the testing situation itself is more tension-producing for Japanese than for Americans. In studies of stress in Japan, they found that Japanese control subjects, who watched a bland film on rice planting, showed almost as much tension as subjects who were shown tension-producing scenes of a subincision ceremony. The Japanese resembled highly anxious American subjects in the testing situation. The only drop in physiological tension for Japanese subjects occurred in between film presentations, when the experiment seemed temporarily suspended. The authors concluded that personal observation and evaluation are more threatening for the Japanese.

One implication of this finding is that many cross-cultural results are not comparable because subjects in different countries react differently to the very act of observation. This is an important argument against single replication studies. Only systematic and carefully designed research can provide information about *patterns* of behavior within a culture, and thus minimize the effects of differences in initial reaction to the tester or testing situation.

The Japanese pattern of alienation provides another possible explanation for anticonformity. Lifton (1962) has found that Japanese students are particularly prone to alienated reactions. They have left the security of the family and are not yet safely ensconced in the bosom of a paternalistic company and work clique. Many students feel isolated and disoriented without close, primary group ties. Furthermore, conflict between traditional and modern values and difficulty in finding adequate role models result in strong feelings of insecurity and identity conflict.

I personally feel that anticonformity is due primarily to lack of true independence of judgment in many Japanese. As mentioned earlier, weakness of individual and original thinking in Japan was discussed by Hajime Nakamura (1964) and also in Kerlinger's (1951) description of group decision-making. Anticonformity strongly resembles conformity in that behavior is still solely oriented to and in fact, controlled by, the group. Independence of judgment is a totally different process. If indeed the Japanese have traditionally been dominated by social considerations and antirational tendencies, it is not surprising that the first reaction of alienated individuals takes the form of anticonformity rather than independence.

The prevalence of anticonformity in Japan may seem surprising, at first, in light of descriptions of socially oriented Japanese culture. However, anticonformity does seem to characterize actual behavior in Japan today. Japanese student rioters do not fit the traditional picture of the hierarchy-dominated, submissive Japanese conformist. The Japanese protesters are, if anything, considerably more intransigent than students elsewhere.

What are the psychological dynamics behind Japanese student reactions? Part of the answer seems closely related to the anticonformity pattern. Japanese students are demanding "democratic" reforms but acting in absolutist terms, much like anticonformists who substitute negative conformity for true independence. They seem to be reacting negatively against authority rather than seeking new, independently formulated goals.

Conclusions

The phenomenon of anticonformity in Japan has important implications for psychology and for comparative studies in general. For one thing, it illustrates the importance of cross-cultural research in social psychology. Japanese data on anticonformity represent a new dimension of this behavior, one of the most widely studied, theoretically important areas in social psychology. The data also provide insight into the dynamic psychological process behind critical social issues in Japan today.

Research in experimental social psychology in Japan has great value for psychology as well as for Japan studies. By applying psychological theories to behavior in other cultures, we can learn a great deal about the inadequacies and blind spots in our original concepts. The vast majority of psycho-

logical research published in the United States deals with only a minute portion of the wide range of human behavior—primarily the behavior of white middle-class college students.

As a social psychologist I am interested in cross-cultural research for what it can contribute to general psychological theories. As a social scientist specializing in Japan, I value experimental data for making more precise and explicit comparisons of behavior in Japan and abroad. Impressionistic, descriptive treatments of Japanese culture have tended to focus on unique and striking aspects of Japanese behavior. On the subject of conformity, for example, submission to the group has been frequently discussed, and reactions against social pressures usually ignored. Controlled laboratory experimentation can provide a quantitative check on broad-range, descriptive research.

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NOTES

1. Now at the University of California, Santa Cruz.
2. For example, in research on obedience behavior in American subjects, Milgram (1963) clearly demonstrated that the observed degree of obedience was considerably greater than the predictions of sophisticated and qualified psychiatrists and psychologists.
3. Hollander and Willis have used the terms variability and self-anticonformity instead. I feel that inconsistency best describes the particular kind of behavior noted in my own studies. Our differences are more terminological than theoretical.
4. It is interesting to note that these dimensions are closely related to Maruyama's (1965) paradigm of individuation.
5. In personal conversations, two major researchers on the subject of social conformity, Solomon Asch and Stanley Milgram, stated that anticonformity was never observed in their studies, and two others, Richard Crutchfield and Read Tuddenham, mentioned that they did observe some anticonformity, but that it was so rare they never followed it up.

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